



Memorandum

TO: PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: Joseph Horwedel

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: January 15, 2002

COUNCIL DISTRICT: 1

SUBJECT: CPA98-02-015 CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT AMENDMENT TO ALLOW RESTORATION AND MODIFICATION OF APPROVED AREAS OF LANDSCAPING THAT WERE ILLEGALLY ELIMINATED FROM THE SUBJECT SITE

BACKGROUND

This item was last before the Planning Commission on November 28, 2001. The Commission took testimony from the property owner and then continued the item to January 9, 2002, to allow the applicant to prepare revised plans that address the landscape-related concerns that were identified by Planning Staff in the staff report and presentation. On January 9, the item was deferred to January 23 in order to allow the applicant more time to prepare a revised site layout incorporating a greater net area of landscaping on the site. Revised plans were received on January 14, 2002 and are enclosed with this memorandum. The attached plans also includes further modifications that staff is recommending as a condition of approval for this project (see analysis, below).

ANALYSIS

As noted on the plans, several areas of landscaping are proposed to be added to the existing site layout in locations that had previously been severely under-landscaped and out of conformance with the approved Landscape Plan. The applicant has stated that the attached plans, as proposed, show the maximum amount of new landscaping that the site can accommodate. The new landscaping is appropriately located in relatively high-visibility areas near the perimeters of the site, and the revised layout is clearly an improvement over existing conditions.

However, it is staff's opinion that the proposed Site Plan is still deficient in several important respects. Please refer to the corresponding numbers on the attached Site Plan. (The "bold"-lined areas represent new landscape areas proposed by the applicant, while the highlighted areas are staff's additional recommendations).

1. The landscaping being added along the Moorpark Avenue frontage should be increased to 15 feet in width to match the nearby landscaping on the hotel site. Fifteen feet, which is what was originally approved, would still allow three parking spaces to remain in this location. To accommodate this improvement, the

driveway immediately to the north should be reduced from 30 to 26 feet in width. Twenty-six feet is a relatively generous width for two-way traffic, and would not impede vehicular circulation. The Fire Department has long identified the 26-foot width as its standard for adequate fire truck movements, and this site is not intensively used for circulation by large commercial trucks. Therefore, the greater width proposed by the applicant is unnecessary in this case.

In keeping with standard site design policy, two feet of “overhang” over the landscaped area should be subtracted from the length of the parking spaces in order to help increase the size of the landscaped area. (This comment applies equally to other areas of the site where new landscaping is being added).

2. The landscaped planter at the end of the front of the parking aisle should be increased in size, reducing the driveway width from 35 feet to 26 feet. Thirty-five feet is considerably more than is needed to provide good on-site circulation. The planter can be enlarged while maintaining a relatively wide radius to facilitate turning movements. The landscaping should also be enlarged by minimizing the amount of area left open for drainage purposes. This high-visibility area of the site, which is currently very under-landscaped (see photo below), represents a key opportunity to improve the visual qualities of the overall site.



Looking north from Moorpark Avenue frontage

3. The width of the landscaping on both sides of the driveway in this area should be increased by approximately two feet, reducing the driveway width to 26 feet. This would provide the standard two-way driveway width, while at the same time tying together two planters that are currently offset from one another in a somewhat awkward configuration.
4. The parking space proposed at the end of the row should be eliminated, and the new area of landscaping extended to wrap around the existing parking spaces. It is standard City practice to have all new off-street parking spaces buffered from driveways and circulation aisles by landscaping. It is particularly relevant in this case, as there are nearby parking spaces with back-out area that is “aimed” directly at the proposed, unprotected space.

The staff-recommended configuration, which includes the measures enumerated above, would effectively maximize the amount of landscaping that can be added to the site without eliminating required parking spaces or overly restricting on-site vehicular circulation. In addition to bringing the site into closer conformance with the approved plans, some of the new landscaping proposed by staff represents a small net gain of total landscaped area, above and beyond what was originally approved. The purpose of this additional landscaping is to help offset the significant diminution of the overall aesthetic quality of the site that resulted from the previous illegal removal of numerous trees.

CONCLUSION

Staff is supportive of the proposed changes, but believes that the changes do not go far enough in correcting the on-site deficiencies. Staff recommends that the Commission approve this Permit Amendment, but condition its approval upon the applicant being required to obtain and implement a subsequent Permit Adjustment that incorporates the site layout proposed by staff (as shown on the attached plans). The revised Resolution includes this condition and “time-certain” conditions of approval for the submittal of the Permit Adjustment and completion of the work.

The attached plans are only intended to address the addition of landscaped areas to the site plan. In the interests of resolving the larger site design-related issues for this item in a timely fashion, staff is recommending that the details of the planting plan be reviewed by the Director of Planning via a Permit Adjustment, subsequent to the final outcome of this Conditional Use Permit Amendment. The planting plan shall include 24-inch box trees in all areas of new landscaping. The trees shall be of an appropriate species (e.g., Sycamore trees) to provide canopy-type growth, and densely planted (generally 15-20 feet on center, or in small clusters). The planting plan shall also include ground cover and shrubs and other planting materials, as deemed appropriate by the Director of planning. As referenced above, the subsequent Adjustment should incorporate the staff-recommended site layout changes, to the satisfaction of the Director of Planning.

Joseph Horwedel, Acting Director
Planning, Building and Code Enforcement